LISTING OF THE CLAIMS

1. (Original) A method for mixing meat products, the method including the steps of:

(a) providing a comminuted first meat product having a first pH;

(b) providing a comminuted second meat product having a second pH different from the first pH;

(c) forming an intermediate combination comprising a quantity of the second meat product at a temperature at or above the freezing point of the second meat product and a plurality of pieces of the first meat product at a temperature below the freezing point of the first meat product; and

(d) mixing the intermediate combination.

2. (Original) The method of Claim 1 wherein the step of providing the first meat product includes the steps of:

(a) forming a quantity of the first meat product into at least one elongated strand; and

(b) reducing the temperature of the elongated strand to the temperature below the freezing point of the first meat product.

3. (Original) The method of Claim 2 further including the step of:

(a) breaking the elongated strand of the first meat product at the temperature below the freezing temperature of the first meat product into a plurality of pieces.

4. (Original) The method of Claim 3 wherein the step of breaking the elongated strand of first meat product into the plurality of pieces includes the step of:

(a) applying bending force to the elongated strand of frozen first meat product at points along the length of the strand.

5. (Original) The method of Claim 4 wherein at least a portion of the bending force to the elongated strand of frozen first meat product is applied by contact with the second meat product.

6. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 1 wherein the step of mixing the intermediate combination includes:

(a) mixing the intermediate combination until substantially all of the first meat product in the intermediate combination reaches a temperature above the freezing point of the first meat product.

7. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 1 wherein the temperature of the first meat product pieces in the intermediate combination at the time the intermediate combination is formed comprises a temperature no greater than 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

8. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 1 wherein the temperature of the second meat product in the intermediate combination at the time the intermediate combination is formed is between approximately 33 degrees Fahrenheit and 65 degrees Fahrenheit.

9. (Original) The method of Claim 2 wherein the step of forming the first meat product into at least one elongated strand includes the steps of:

(a) forcing the quantity of first meat product through a grinder screen having at least one grinder screen opening.

10. (Original) The method of Claim 9 wherein the step of forcing the first meat product through the grinder screen raises the temperature of the first meat product from a temperature no greater than zero degrees Fahrenheit to a temperature between 23 to 28 degrees Fahrenheit.

11. (Original) The method of Claim 10 further including the step of reducing the temperature of the first meat product to a temperature no greater than 20 degrees Fahrenheit after forcing the first meat product through the grinder screen and before forming the intermediate combination.

12. (Original) The method of Claim 9 wherein the grinder screen opening is approximately one-quarter inch in diameter and wherein the second meat product is made up of a comminuted meat product which has been comminuted at a grind size greater than one-quarter inch.

13. (Original) The method of Claim 1 wherein the first meat product comprises a pH modified meat product.

14. (Original) The method of Claim 13 further including the step of:

(a) adding a pH modifying material to an initial meat product to produce the pH modified first meat product.

15. (Original) The method of Claim 14 wherein the pH modifying material comprises ammonia.

16. (Original) The method of Claim 1 wherein the first meat product comprises Lean Finely Textured Beef and the second meat product comprises ground beef.

17. (Original) The method of Claim 1 wherein the plurality of pieces of frozen first meat product have a first cross sectional dimension and the second meat product is made of pieces of meat having a maximum cross sectional dimension larger than the first cross sectional dimension.

18. (Original) A method for mixing meat products, the method including the steps of:

(a) forming an intermediate combination comprising a plurality of pieces of a first meat product at a temperature below the freezing point of the first meat product and a quantity of a second meat product at a temperature at or above the freezing point of the second meat product, the first meat product having a first pH and the second meat product having a second pH different from the first pH; and

(b) mixing the intermediate combination.

19. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 18 further including the following steps prior to forming the intermediate combination[of]:

(a) forming a quantity of the first meat product into at least one elongated strand; and

(b) reducing the temperature of the elongated strand to the temperature below the freezing point of the first meat product.

20. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 19 further including the step of:

(a) breaking the at least one elongated strand of the first meat product at the temperature below the freezing temperature of the first meat product into a plurality of pieces.

21. (Original) The method of Claim 19 wherein the step of forming the first meat product into at least one elongated strand includes the steps of:

(a) forcing the quantity of the first meat product through a grinder screen having at least one grinder screen opening.

22. (Original) The method of Claim 18 wherein the step of mixing the intermediate combination includes:

(a) mixing the intermediate combination until substantially all of the first meat product in the intermediate combination reaches a temperature above the freezing point of the first meat product.

23. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 18 further including the step[s] of:

(a) adding a pH modifying material to an initial meat product to produce the first meat product prior to reducing the temperature of the first meat product to the temperature below the freezing point of the first meat product and prior to forming the intermediate combination.

24. (Original) The method of Claim 18 wherein the plurality of pieces of frozen first meat product have a first cross sectional dimension and the second meat product is made of pieces of meat having a maximum cross sectional dimension larger than the first cross sectional dimension.

25. (Withdrawn) An apparatus for mixing meat products, the apparatus including:

(a) a forming arrangement for forming a plurality of frozen pieces of a first meat product;

(b) a second meat product supply containing a second meat product at a temperature at or above the freezing point of the second meat product; and

(c) a mixing device connected to receive the second meat product from the second meat product supply and operative to mix the plurality of frozen pieces of the first meat product together with the second meat product.

26. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of Claim 25 wherein the forming arrangement includes:

(a) a strand forming device for forming at least one elongated strand of a first meat product; and

(b) a freezing device connected to the strand forming device for receiving the at least one strand of first meat product, the freezing device operable to reduce the temperature of the at least one strand of first meat product to a temperature below the freezing point of the first meat product.

27. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of Claim 26 wherein the strand forming device comprises a grinder including a grinder screen through which the first meat product is forced to produce the at least one elongated strand of the first meat product.